

Foucault and power essay

Law



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Arrigo and Bernard's (1997) article identifies six theoretical statements that compare conflict theory to radical and postmodern criminology.

These six concerns include; the focus of the theory, the goal of conflict, control of crime definitions, nature of crime, explanation of crime, and policy implications. Arrigo and Bernard's (1997) theory suggests that postmodern criminology is consistent with conflict criminology's definition of crime, while radical criminology is consistent with conflict criminology and the focus of the theory (conflict oriented) and the goal of the conflict. Both conflict and radical criminology center on social structure while postmodern criminology tends to focus more on the human aspect.

Conflict and radical criminology tends to concentrate on economic and political powers, but fails to discuss how that power is achieved, and implies that crime is explained in terms of the pursuit for economic success influenced by a capitalist society. Conflict criminology proposes that a capitalist society seeks to equalize the distribution of power/wealth among individuals thereby equalizing the distribution of crime rates, while radical criminology suggests that the problem is rooted in a capitalistic economic system and the only way to attain within this system would be the demise of capitalism. Postmodern criminology identifies the problem of the crime as a linguistic domination and examines the relationship between human agencies and the language which creates meaning, identity, and power. This area of criminology suggests that crime may be rooted in linguistic realities, and can only be solved by listening and incorporating alternate points of view on crime and social harm. Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison (1975), by Michel Foucault, examines the social and theoretical implications

which inevitably led to substantial changes in western penal systems during the modern age. Using Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, Foucault believes that this instrument is used to provoke the inmate into a conscious state and constant visibility/supervision which guarantees an automatic implementation of power. The panopticon is a significant apparatus since it deindividualizes and automatizes power by increasing the number of individuals who can be controlled, while decreasing the number of individuals who operate it.

This ensures that power is more economic, effective, and efficient. Foucault challenges the idea that punishment within the penal system was linked to reformists humanitarian concerns, and reveals a change in culture which ultimately led to prison's dominance while concentrating on questions of power and the body. Using prison as a form of discipline is a form of power, which can also be currently found in schools and other various institutions. Foucault decentralizes power and argues that it not operated through class but rather through organization and strategies. Foucault claims that power, including its techniques and operations, should be understood in terms of its procedure rather than of what it is.

The state does not own power, and power is not specific to any particular institution or organization; it is an apparatus that no one owns, and its applications are numerous and dispersed throughout all social institutions. Foucault maintains that society can be understood through differences between primitive and civilized societies. Knowledge and power are intertwined since knowledge is power and we as individuals have the ability to create knowledge systems and learning discourses such as 'Criminology'.

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If individuals have knowledge and power to create such discourses, they also have the capacity to control crime. Foucault ultimately rejects the notion of individuality and suggests that individuals are part of a power structure in which each individual plays a specific role.